

Bridging the Gap:

*How students from immigrant families navigate
Philadelphia's high school application process*

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Introduction

Every fall, eighth graders in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) have the opportunity to apply to up to five district-managed high schools. The high school application system presents students and families with choices, but taking full advantage of the system requires understanding the high school admission criteria, the various programs and features of the district's 60 high schools and 24 charter high schools,¹ and the steps in the application process. School choice research tends to focus on parent management of decisions, but this brief recognizes the critical role of students in managing the high school application process, particularly for adolescents from immigrant families whose parents are not familiar with the American educational system, do not speak English, and/or have limited education.

School districts do not have records on students' immigrant or generational status, so immigrant children and children of immigrants can be an "invisible" to schools. Race/ethnicity and English-language-learner (ELL) status are inadequate proxies for immigrant status, but this brief illustrates that students from immigrant families are a group that requires researchers', policy makers', and educators' attention. In 2000, nine percent of Philadelphia's population was foreign-born, and 18 percent of the population ages five and older spoke a language other than English at home.² Language, educational, and cultural differences present challenges for parents to monitor and participate in their children's education. Therefore, it is important for schools and communities to consider how they can best support these students and their families.

Methodology

This brief³ draws on interviews conducted with 47 eighth grade students and 27 parents during the 2008-09 school year, including 25 students from immigrant families and 16 immigrant parents.⁴ It also draws on interviews conducted with 10 counselors in elementary and middle schools about the high school application process.

¹ These numbers reflect the high schools open in 2008-09.

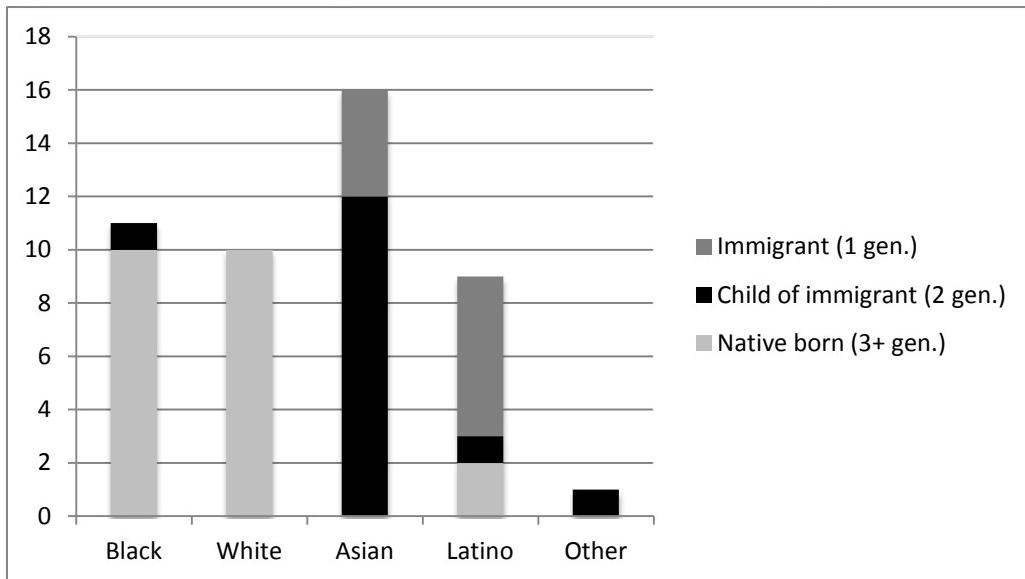
² U.S. Census, 2000.

³ This brief uses data from a mixed-methods study conducted by Clarisse Haxton for her dissertation, supported by the William Penn Foundation and the Institute for Education Sciences Grant # R305C050041.

⁴ Students were selected from among respondents to a parent survey that was sent home to all eighth graders along with their high school application information in the 10 study schools. The sample was selected to include the four major racial/ethnic categories (Black, White, Asian, Latino), varying levels of families' self-reported information about the high school application process, and students from each of the study schools.

In order to examine the experiences of native-born and immigrant students in the high school application process, it was important to balance the sample by race/ethnicity and immigrant status. Therefore, this purposeful sample does not represent the racial/ethnic breakdown of the overall SDP population.⁵ Figure 1 provides the generational status and country breakdown of the student sample and Figure 2 describes the parent sample.

Figure 1. Race and immigrant status of student interview sample (n=47)

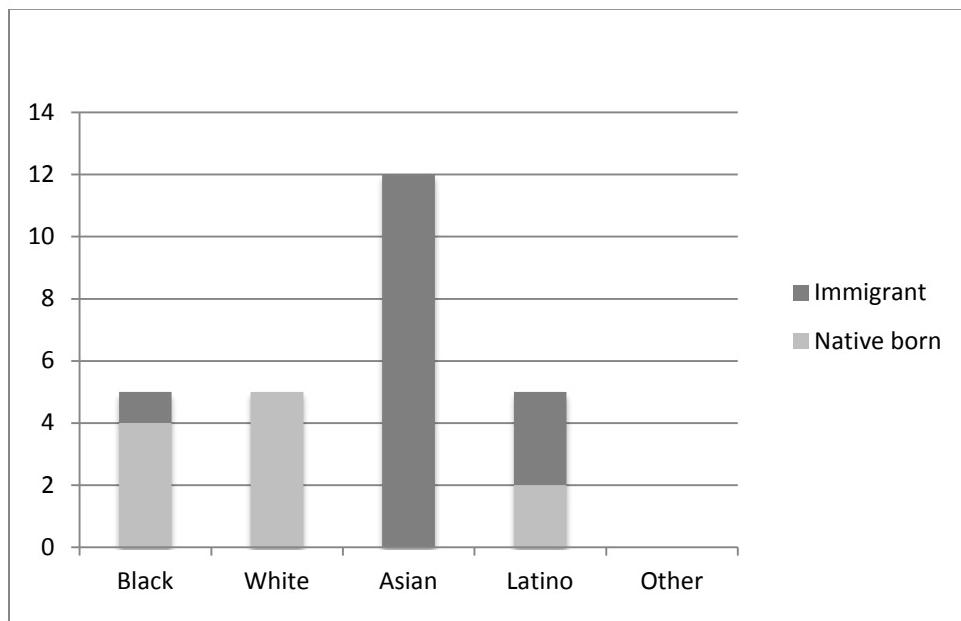


Ten of the students were immigrants and 15 were children of immigrants. A total of 11 Black, 10 White, 16 Asian, 9 Latino, and 1 Other race student were interviewed. Gender balance was also considered in the sampling process, resulting in interviews of 21 girls and 26 boys.

The parent interview sample included 27 total parents, 16 of whom were immigrants. Interviews were pursued for all parents of the sampled students. To facilitate immigrant parent participation, interviews with non-English-speaking parents were conducted in the parents' native language by the researcher and an interpreter.

⁵ An analysis of 2008-09 eighth grade students in the SDP found the following race/ethnic composition: 61 percent Black, 14 percent White, 6 percent Asian, 19 percent Latino, and 1 percent Other. Among eighth graders in 2008-09, 8 percent were identified as English-language-learners (ELL), and 18 percent were identified as special education students (n=12,160).

Figure 2. Race and immigrant status of parent interview sample (n=27)



As Figure 2 shows, one of the Black parents was an immigrant (from Mali), all of the Asian parents were immigrants (from China, Cambodia, and Vietnam), and three of the Latino parents were immigrants (from Mexico).

This study focuses on a specific segment of the American immigrant population, including Asian refugee immigrants and Latino labor immigrants who are similarly disadvantaged in terms of educational attainment and socioeconomic status. The Vietnamese and Cambodian immigrants in the study sample are members of the third-wave of Southeast Asian refugees that have come to the United States since 1975, a group that is poorer and less educated than earlier waves of Southeast Asian refugees (Ngo & Lee, 2007). The Asian students in this sample were all born in the United States. The Mexican students in this sample were all born in Mexico. The Mexican families immigrated to the United States more recently, following the economic downturn in the early 1990s.

The parents in the sample generally had a high school or lower education; some refugees had never attended school. Five of the 16 immigrant parents had at least a high school-level education. Among Asian parents in the sample, 10 of 12 had attended school sporadically, if at all. Parents generally had working class jobs or did not work at

all, and most spoke limited English. Only one of the 16 immigrant parents had attended any postsecondary education, compared with five of the nine native-born parents.

Despite their parents' low education, the students in the sample were relatively well qualified for admission to a selective high school in Philadelphia's tiered system.⁶ In the interview sample, all of the 25 students from immigrant families met at least the citywide high school admission criteria, compared with eight of 22 native-born students. These numbers may not be representative of the entire population due to participation bias, and it is important to note that unqualified immigrant students are not included in this study. Study information was sent home with the students' high school application information at the study schools, but students did not necessarily share the High School Directory and other high school information with their immigrant parents who did not speak or read English. The study information was translated into their native languages to encourage parents' response, but this did not account for the fact that some immigrant parents do not know how to read. Thus, this sample likely over-represents highly motivated and high-achieving students from immigrant families. Given this "best case scenario" of high achievers from disadvantaged, immigrant families, it is important to recognize that the challenges described in this brief are likely amplified for average or low-achieving immigrant students, underscoring the need to support immigrant students.

This brief describes how immigrant children and children of immigrants navigate the high school application process, reveals challenges specific to this group, and presents recommendations for schools and community organizations to better support these students. Refer to Appendix A for a summary of the challenges and recommendations described in this brief.

⁶ All students are allowed to apply to high schools in eighth grade, and all high schools are choice options, but each tier of high schools has specific admission criteria. Criteria vary slightly across individual schools, but special admission high schools are the most selective, and applicants are generally required to have all As and Bs with up to 1 C in seventh grade, have Advanced or Proficient state standardized test scores, five or fewer absences, 10 or fewer latenesses, and no suspensions. Citywide high schools are less selective; the attendance and suspension criteria is the same as special admission high schools, but students can have As, Bs, and Cs in seventh grade and standardized test scores are not considered for citywide high school admission. Neighborhood high schools are not selective.

Mr. Vahng exemplifies the immigrant parents' attitudes about the importance of education, but inability to directly monitor or help their children. The Vahng family is Cambodian. Kyle Vahng was in eighth grade at the time of the study and had two siblings who attended selective high schools. Mr. Vahng moved to the United States when he was about 22 years old, after escaping from Cambodia to Thailand and later being sponsored by his sister to come to America. He came to Philadelphia in 1986 for a job, after spending several years in the Midwest. He earned his GED and wanted to continue his education, but had to quit school to work. He had only attended school for about three years in Cambodia "before the Communists took over and there was no more school," and he values the educational opportunities in the United States. Mr. Vahng works for a commercial glass company and he reminds his children,

Challenge 1: Immigrant parents in this sample generally had low levels of education and were not familiar with the American educational system.

Prior research has found that parent expectations predict student outcomes even after controlling for socioeconomic status.⁷ In the interview sample, immigrant parents' optimism about their children's educational opportunities in the United States was associated with students' achievement. Their frame of reference to their home country instilled in their children a sense of fortune about the educational opportunities in the United States. However, because of their limited English and low levels of formal education, the immigrant parents in this sample were generally unable to help their children with schoolwork or with making educational decisions such as where to apply for high school.

"I don't have a lot of education. I want them to pass me."

In interviews, parents reported constantly reminding their children to do well in school and telling their children that they do not want their children to struggle financially as they have, but they lacked the ability to provide their children with concrete help.

Mr. Vahng⁸ (featured in sidebar) and other parents explained that the computer, library and the children's older siblings are good resources, but they said that if

⁷Goyette, K. & Xie, Y. (1999). Educational Expectations of Asian-American Youth: Determinants and Ethnic Differences. *Sociology of Education*, 72, 22-36.

Kao, G. & Tienda, M. (1995). Optimism and Achievement: The Educational Performance of Immigrant Youth. *Social Science Quarterly*, 76, 1-19.

⁸ All names used in this brief are pseudonyms, and students are assigned the same last name as their parents' for readers' convenience.

they knew English (better) or had more education, they would be more involved in their children's education. Other immigrant parents were even less able than Mr. Vahng to monitor their children's education because they had little to no education themselves. Mrs. Nguyen, for example, had never attended school. She tells her son, Michael, to work hard, but she did not know any details about his schooling. She stated, "(My son) tells me he is doing well, but I don't know. I can look at the homework to see if it's done, but that's all." Fourteen of the 16 immigrant parents expressed optimism about their children's educational opportunities relative to their own, but the combination of limited education and limited English made it difficult for immigrant parents to know much about their children's education.

Also, two Mexican immigrant parents worried about their children's limited opportunities beyond high school since they do not have legal papers. Mrs. Ortiz worried that her daughter, Maria, would not be motivated to finish high school because she would not be able to get a good career with only a high school degree. She contemplated moving back to Mexico and thought that her daughter might be able to return to the United States for college on a student visa. Citizenship and age differences among siblings also caused tension in this family. Maria's younger sister was born in Philadelphia and Maria was frustrated that her little sister would have more opportunities just because she was born in the United States. Another Mexican mother, Mrs. Lopez , said that her daughter, Carmen, "likes to study but she says that she will only finish [high school] because as an immigrant, she can't go higher than high school. I tell her I think it's a step towards a good career. This is what I am thinking... but I don't know." The issue of legal status

"Education is very important. I didn't want them to end up like me, doing physical work. It's not easy. I just hope they understand and study hard." His children were sitting on the couch next to me during our interview and they all chuckled as he looked over at them. I asked, "Do you hear this a lot?" and they replied, "*All the time.*"

Mr. Vahng had more education and knew more English than most immigrant parents in the sample, but he still felt unable to help his children with homework and to monitor their progress. He said:

I just try to push them to study whatever they have to study. I don't really know what they study. Plus, my education is not that high so I can only help them so much... but they have their own computer so they can find out from the computer. Sometimes, I even tell them to go to the library or something.

muted immigrant optimism in these families.

"It depends on the student, not the school."

Although immigrant parent optimism about educational opportunities seemed to have an influence on their children, one challenge of immigrant parents' frame of reference to their own limited access to school is that some did not understand the importance of the high school application process. Four of the 16 immigrant parents expressed the belief that, "It depends on the student, not the school." Mrs. Chey, for example, said that her daughter, Anne, mentioned high schools to her, but she said, "It's not the school... It depends on the student, whether they're willing to learn or not."

Mrs. Perez (featured in the sidebar) did not know much about the differences between schools when her oldest daughter was ready for high school. Her first daughter got pregnant in tenth grade and dropped out. After that experience, Mrs. Perez tried to be proactive about high school selection with her second daughter, Marisol. She asked parents she knew in the community for advice about high schools. She was disappointed that a community organization had information for parents about kindergarten but not about high schools. Mrs. Perez also advised Marisol to ask her counselor and teachers for help.

The immigrant parents' belief that "all schools are good" differed from that of native-born parents and school counselors. While the native-born parents and counselors recognized that students *could* be successful in any school and pointed to examples, they also elaborated on the many challenges and distractions at the neighborhood high schools, including limited numbers of advanced courses, dropout problems, and climate and safety issues. In

Marisol Perez lives with her parents, older sister and her older sister's baby. Mr. Perez came to the United States in 1998 because he was unable to find work in Mexico. He followed his brothers, who had moved to Philadelphia. Mrs. Perez joined him in 2000, and Marisol came with her older sister in 2001. In the interim, the girls lived with their grandparents in Mexico. Mrs. Perez finished elementary school and Mr. Perez finished secondary school in Mexico. Mr. Perez has worked in a pizzeria for nine years and Mrs. Perez does not work. They do not speak English.

In an interview, Mrs. Perez explained that due to language barriers and a lack of familiarity with the American school system, she did not think that Marisol's school choice mattered:

To be honest, we did not have an understanding of the schools. [Marisol's sister] was our first daughter going to high school and I didn't have any idea. I thought that all schools were good. It was the nearest to my house, so that is the reason why we chose that school.

contrast, some immigrant parents did not understand the tiered system of high schools in Philadelphia and put the burden of educational success entirely on their children.

Recommendations

- Hold meetings for seventh and eighth grade parents—at school by the counselor or at a community organization—to explain the types of high schools in the SDP, admission requirements, and the high school application process.⁹ For parent meetings at schools, make sure that bilingual counseling assistants (BCAs) or other interpreters are present so the information can be made accessible to non-English-speaking parents.

Challenge 2: Not all documents are translated, and interpreters are not always available at schools.

English language proficiency is a major barrier for immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education. There are itinerant translators, interpreters, and BCAs assigned to all schools in the SDP, but they do not necessarily cover all of the languages spoken in a school and they are not always on campus to translate documents for parents or interpret for parents and teachers. Furthermore, the budget for the 2011-12 school year resulted in layoffs of nearly half of the district's BCAs.

Document Translation

The counselors and parents were both grateful for the translators, interpreters, and BCAs, but they spoke about home-school communication challenges. One counselor explained, "The immigrant parents, sometimes I speak to them the least because I don't speak the language and we don't have a BCA who speaks the language. So that's sometimes difficult." Another counselor explained that his school is very diverse and that the district is increasingly diverse. There are four BCAs at his school who speak Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Khmer¹⁰, but there are nine languages spoken at his school. He said, "We translate as much as we can—the school calendar, letters that go home—for the parents," but he acknowledged that the school cannot translate every document in every language.

⁹ Please see the Research For Action brief, "*Counselors are critical: How middle school counselors can support students in Philadelphia's high school application process*" for suggestions about information it is useful to provide students in this process.

¹⁰ This is pronounced Ka-mai. It is the language of Cambodia.

Some Mexican parents reported that translating the district's High School Directory would be helpful because they were literate in Spanish but could not access the information in English. Some of the counselors reported that the Directory had been printed in other languages in the past, but was currently only printed in English due to budget constraints. The Directory was available on the district website in English and other languages in the study year, but families and school counselors both reported difficulties in navigating the website to find the Directory. In addition, the 2009 Directory was a 40-page pdf file that several parents said they could not open on their computers.

Mrs. Perez explained,

It would have been really different if it were in Spanish because parents could read about every school... We don't know that in some schools they use a lottery or they need a certain grade in order to qualify or you can't miss school that often. If we read it in Spanish, it would be a lot easier for us.

In our interview, she listed the specific information she would like to know about the high schools, including the location, phone number, course grade requirements, career programs and other programs offered, and school safety, nearly all of which were in the Directory.

However, some strategies may not work for all immigrant groups. For example, document translation is not a solution for immigrant parents such as many of the Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees in this sample who have had no or minimal formal schooling and do not know how to read.

Interpreters

Parents employed strategies such as bringing a family member to interpret at meetings, having a family member attend school meetings on their behalf, or having their child interpret for them. However, immigrant parents who do not speak English have less information about their child's education than other parents because many of the details about students' performance or high school options are lost in translation.

Teachers and school counselors often rely on students to interpret at parent-teacher conferences and translate documents for their parents, but the interviewed students reported feeling uncomfortable reading and translating detailed information for their parents due to their own limited vocabulary in their parents' native language. As Steven Wang said, "I can't really talk to my mom because I don't know (Chinese) enough to explain, and she doesn't know any English." Additionally, when students are trying to understand the high school application process and documents such as the High School Directory, it is difficult for them to explain it to their parents.

Recommendations

- Translate the High School Directory into foreign languages and make hard copies available in the counselor's office, main office, library, or another central location at the school.
- Include in the English version of the Directory a web address for the foreign language versions so students know exactly where to find them online.
- More of the district's counselors and counseling aides need to be bilingual as the SDP becomes increasingly diverse.

Challenge 3: All parents were concerned about distance, safety, and the increasing independence of their adolescents in the high school application process, but these concerns were exacerbated in immigrant families.

Because of a variety of challenges faced by the city's neighborhood high schools, many parents expressed a desire that their students land a spot in a school outside their neighborhood. The prospect of traveling across the city to attend a different school, however, raised logistical issues of transportation, distance, and time. Native-born parents weighed their worries about their children traveling a distance on public transportation against worries about their children attending neighborhood high schools, which were described as "violent," "chaotic," and "the bottom of the pit." For qualified students, the native-born families agreed that the benefits of attending a selective high school outweighed the transportation issues.

Like native-born parents, some immigrant parents wanted their children to attend a high school outside the neighborhood, sometimes because of racial tensions in their children's elementary or middle schools that they hoped to avoid in high school.

Jonathan Im, a Cambodian student, got into a fight with an African American student at school and Mrs. Im explained that when she went to meet with the principal, "The other boy's whole family was there, like to scare us." She explained that she was frightened and understood why her older daughters did not want Jonathan to attend the neighborhood high school. Marisol Perez, a Mexican student, reported that the African American students at her school yell in the cafeteria that she and her friends are immigrants and should go back to their country. Marisol said it makes her mad and described the tensions between Latino and African American students as "a big deal." Mr. Diallo, an immigrant from Mali, said that his son, David, is not somebody who wants to fight so he tries to avoid conflict with African American students in his class. Mr. Diallo explained that David's neighborhood middle school was predominantly African American and he had been made fun of so much that Mr. Diallo was able to transfer him to another middle school. Mr. Diallo was adamant that David would not attend the neighborhood high school.

The issue of long-distance travel, however, raised concerns for some immigrant parents whose children were applying for high schools outside the neighborhood. All of the immigrant students in the sample met the criteria for citywide high school admission and some met the criteria for special admission high schools as well, but some parents who did not speak English restricted their child's choices to selective high schools close to home—or to the neighborhood high school—because they felt powerless to monitor their children. Mrs. Wang remembered being scared when her son, Steven, did not come home immediately after school one day. She wandered around the neighborhood looking for him, and eventually found him at his school, getting help on an assignment. She reported being "so scared," but since she does not speak English, she could not call the school or ask anyone in the neighborhood if they had seen her son. Mrs. Wang said "it's good" if Steven attends a selective high school, "but only if it's not too far." Mrs. Chey also wanted her daughter, Anne, to stay close to home. Anne was a good student, but Mrs. Chey was worried because her older daughter had traveled across the city to one of the district's top high schools, but got pregnant in high school and dropped out. Mrs. Chey said, "If she doesn't come home, what can I do?"

Recommendations

- At both large-group and individual meetings on the high school application process, address parent concerns about safety and transportation. Provide

information to help parents understand where schools are located, and what transportation options would be available to students traveling from their neighborhood.

- Help students access online resources such as the SEPTA trip planner or Google maps to plan public transportation routes to various high schools from their house. Counselors or community organizations could help immigrant students to find someone to commute with from their school or neighborhood. As several native-born parents did, counselors or community organizations could also help students “practice” the routes to the high school they are going to attend so they become familiar with it before the ninth grade school year begins.

Challenge 4: Immigrant students manage the high school application process independently, and they do not typically assess “fit” in their application decisions.

Unlike students in native-born families whose parents can help their children navigate school and the high school application process, albeit to varying degrees, students in immigrant families often have to navigate their education by themselves. Due to their limited information and understanding about the high school application process, immigrant parents generally left the application decision up to their child—and older siblings, if they had any. As Mrs. Nguyen stated, “It’s not my decision. It’s up to (my son) to make his choice... He can talk to me any time he wants, but it’s still his choice.”

One counselor gave an example of a student who asked for her help at several points during the high school application process. She said:

This student came to me because her mom speaks Vietnamese, so she came to me and asked me to help her with her application. So we sat down and I went through it with her. And then she got into SLA and she came in again to ask me for help because she was confused about some of the information, because they have to buy insurance for the laptop they get, so we worked that out. And when I called the secretary at SLA to clarify about the laptop, she told me, ‘Oh, I remember (her). She called for directions for her interview.’

The counselor noted that most eighth grade students are inexperienced with navigating social institutions and are not proactive about seeking out help. She said she was proud of this student “because they need to learn to do that kind of thing.”

Students in immigrant families are often required to take initiative for their own education because their parents cannot communicate directly with school staff, monitor schoolwork, or offer advice about educational decisions such as where to apply for high school. All of the immigrant students in the sample were diligent about reading the High School Directory and some did research on high school websites, but *none* of the students from immigrant families went to the High School Expo or set up shadowing appointments at the high schools they were interested in attending.

The Expo is on the weekend and parents are responsible for taking their children. Parents could allow their child to take the subway and attend alone, but every student who I observed at the Expo was chaperoned by an adult. At the Expo itself, parents appeared more comfortable approaching the high school booths to ask questions or pick up an informational brochure than their children, highlighting one of the many ways in which students benefit from adult support in this process and the challenge for immigrant students whose parents cannot help their children in situations such as the Expo.

Additionally, some of the native-born parents scheduled shadowing appointments for their children to visit certain high schools, while students from immigrant families did not participate in this activity. Students could theoretically schedule a shadowing appointment themselves or ask a counselor or teacher to help them, but those approaches require immigrant students to have more initiative and confidence than their native-born peers. In this study, the Expo and shadowing represented important gaps in immigrant students’ information because native-born students reported the Expo and shadowing to be helpful in considering the “fit” between their interests and personality and the high schools they were considering.

While qualified students have good chances of admission at a range of selective high schools, study students from immigrant families did not capitalize on the “fit” goal of

the choice system. They knew the “best” high schools and applied to those at which they met the admission criteria, but their qualified native-born peers explained their application decisions with more specific rationales that included school size, a school or program’s career focus such as law, health, or the arts, features such as project-based learning, and extracurricular opportunities. Given the competitive nature of the high school application system, considering “fit” may increase students’ likelihood of admission by widening their options beyond the most well-known high schools.

Recommendations

- Provide buses or SEPTA passes for all eighth grade students to attend the High School Expo during the school day or after school. If teachers from the student’s middle school chaperone a field trip to the Expo, they can encourage and help students to ask questions and get information about high schools they are interested in attending. (The district provided buses during the school day for all eighth grade students to attend the Expo in previous years, but not in the study year.)
- Establish clear rules about shadowing and include information such as which high schools allow it, when it is allowed, and how to schedule an appointment in the High School Directory for all students.
- Community groups can also play a role in chaperoning students to the Expo and scheduling shadowing appointments for seventh and eighth grade students.

Conclusion

The immigrant students interviewed for this study seemed to fare well in the high school application process, but their continued success requires independence and the support of institutional agents such as counselors and teachers in navigating their education.

Students from immigrant families managed the high school application process more independently than their native-born peers. Most of the native-born parents in the sample had at least a high school education and generally had experience with Philadelphia schools and the high school application process. They all read the High School Directory, could access other high school information to help their children make application decisions, and could discuss the process with their child. Immigrant parents supported their children and emphasized the importance of education, but they

were limited in their ability to provide concrete assistance to their children in school and in the high school application process.

For qualified students, applying to the high schools with the best reputation may return the desired results—all of the immigrant students in the sample were accepted to at least one selective high school. Still, they did not consider how the school “fit” them in terms of their interests and personality as carefully as qualified students in native-born families. The most esteemed high schools tend to be oversubscribed, so considerations beyond the “best” schools are a buffer against rejection and, in theory, an opportunity to increase student engagement in high school. Without the parental support in place to discuss students’ interests and aspirations, the burden for academic and social development falls entirely on students in immigrant families.

Also, though not included in this interview sample, some students from immigrant families did not meet the selective admission criteria. Students with average or weak records face disadvantages because parents are responsible for obtaining charter school and private school applications and advocating for their child’s admission. The students in this sample met the criteria for selective high school admission, indicating their ability to compensate for their parents’ language and education barriers through personal motivation and help-seeking initiative. However, students from immigrant families who do not meet the selective high school admission criteria face greater challenges than their high-achieving peers because they have to make educational decisions with a more limited set of options.

Overall, this brief finds that students from immigrant families play an important role in their own educational decisions. As one counselor in the study noted,

A lot of (immigrant) parents, they don't speak English and they don't quite understand the American school system, so they kind of feel their children know more about the school system. So they let the student, and maybe their friend or their uncle or their aunt, come up with the (high school application) decision, and then the student will talk to their parent, and the parent will kind of more like agree to it.

However, this brief also illustrates that although adolescents are involved in their own education, they benefit from adult guidance in the transition to high school. The immigrant students in the study whose parents did not speak English and had low or no educational attainment applied and achieved admission to schools with reputations for strong academics, but neither they nor their parents had detailed information about school size or curricular features to help personalize the student's application decision. Older siblings played a prominent support role for the students in this study, but they, like the focal student, had limited information and limited skills with which to navigate the high school application process. Therefore, students from immigrant families particularly need support from institutional agents such as counselors, teachers, and community organizations as they navigate the high school application process and throughout their educational careers.

Appendix A: Challenges and Recommendations At-a-Glance

Challenge 1: Immigrant parents generally had low levels of education and were not familiar with the American educational system.

Hold meetings for 7th and 8th grade parents to explain the types of high schools in the SDP, admission requirements, and the high school application process.

Challenge 2: Not all school documents are translated, and interpreters are not always available at schools.

Translate the high school directory into foreign languages and make hard copies available in multiple locations.

Include a website address for the foreign language versions of the directory.

More of the SDP's counselors and aides should be bilingual as the SDP student population becomes increasingly diverse.

Challenge 3: All parents were concerned about distance, safety and the increasing independence of their adolescents in the high school application process, but these concerns were exacerbated in immigrant families.

Challenge 4: Immigrant students manage the high school application process independently and they do not typically assess "fit" in decision-making.

Hold meetings for 7th and 8th grade parents to discuss high school options and parent concerns about safety and distance.

Help students access online resources such as the SEPTA Trip Planner or Google maps to plan and practice public transit routes to various high schools.

Provide busses or SEPTA passes for all 8th grade students to attend the High School Expo during the day or after school. Teachers can also plan a fieldtrip.

Establish clear rules about shadowing and include information such as which high schools allow it, and how to schedule an appointment.

Community groups can help chaperone students to attend the Expo and can help students schedule shadowing appointments.